

As you know, the Iranian issue hasn't even gone up to the Security Council yet. And so there's more diplomacy, in my judgment, to be done. And we'll work very closely with our European friends and other nations. As I mentioned before, we're an active member of the IAEA board, which will give us an opportunity to continue to say to the Iranians, "You've got to be transparent with your program and adhere to protocols that you have signed."

Remember, this all started when they—we found them enriching uranium in an undeclared fashion. And it happened because somebody told on them. There was an Iranian group that brought forth the information, and it was clear that they were enriching. And yet, they hadn't told anybody, which leads you to wonder why they hadn't told anybody. And so you can understand our suspicions.

And we'll work with nations. And in terms of Korea—North Korea, again, it's not Iraq. It's a different situation. But I'm—I remember being with Jiang Zemin in Crawford, and as a result of that meeting, we issued a joint declaration that said that the Korean Peninsula should be nuclear-weapons-free. Since then I've—that policy has been confirmed by President Hu Jintao. And the other day the leader of North Korea declared they had a nuclear weapon, which obviously means that if he is—if he's correct, that the peninsula is not nuclear-weapons-free. So now is the time for us to work with friends and allies who have agreed to be a part of the process to determine what we're jointly going to do about it. And that's where we are in the process right now.

Thank you all very much for your attention and questions. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon, who was assassinated on February 14 in Beirut; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia; National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley; former President Jiang Zemin of China; President Hu Jintao of China; and Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea. The Office of the Press Secretary also re-

leased a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on the Class Action Fairness Act of 2005

February 17, 2005

I commend the House for passing a class-action reform bill that will help protect people who are wrongfully harmed while reducing the frivolous lawsuits that clog our courts, hurt the economy, cost jobs, and burden American businesses. Junk lawsuits have helped drive the cost of America's tort system to more than \$240 billion a year, greater than any other major industrialized nation. This bill is an important step forward in our efforts to reform the litigation system and to continue creating jobs and growing our economy. I look forward to signing the bill into law.

Statement on the Resignation of N. Gregory Mankiw as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers

February 17, 2005

Greg Mankiw has been a trusted member of my economic team and a close adviser. His wise and principled counsel over the past 2 years has helped shape policies that today are fueling our economic growth. I am grateful to Greg for his service to our country, and I wish him, Deborah, and the Mankiw family all the best.

Interview With TV3-France

February 18, 2005

France-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much to welcome Francois. You and President Chirac want to improve your relationship after bitter divisions on Iraq. How do you plan, yourself, to take concrete steps with France, with the allies, and restore credible cooperation on the hardest issues, like Middle East for instance?

The President. Sure. No, I think that's a great question because inherent in your

question is the understanding that there—we share a lot of values. Both our nations value human rights and human dignity and rule of law and transparency. And we value our friendship from years gone by. And I look forward to working with President Chirac. We've have our differences, and now is the time to set those aside and focus on peace in the Middle East. I'll work with the French on—to help the Lebanese have a free and fair election and a burgeoning democracy. And I'll work with the French to continue to help with the Middle Eastern peace process. There's a lot of areas where we need to work together. And we need to continue to work together on HIV/AIDS in Africa and hunger around the world. And I'm looking forward to the meeting.

Syria

Q. You and President Chirac keep telling the Syrians that they have to withdraw immediately their troops.

The President. Yes.

Q. What will you do if they refuse——

The President. Well, that's——

Q.——in the coming weeks?

The President. That's a—my attitude is, is that when we speak together and convince others to speak with us, that the Syrians will get the message. And I'm a hopeful person. I'm hopeful that the President of Syria will hear the world speak. And the French have got a lot of influence in Syria, and we've got some influence as well. And the fact that we're talking together should send a clear signal to President Asad that we're very serious about this.

Iran

Q. Let's come to Iran ——

The President. Sure.

Q.——which is backing terrorism and all that. If Iran refuses to stop its nuclear program, or the kind of same question, what will you do, Mr. President, with the allies or whatever?

The President. Well, I think the key is there for the Iraqis [Iranians]* to hear Europe and the United States speak with one voice. And I appreciate President Chirac and

his Government and as well as the Germans and the Brits working together to say to the Iranians, "We don't want you to have a weapon." In other words, we—the—we share a goal, and that is for the Iranians not to develop a nuclear weapon. And we want to work with our friends to not only speak with one voice, clearly with one voice, but also to help others realize—like Russia realize. And I think President Putin understands that the Iranians shouldn't have weapon. I'm convinced, again, if the Iranians hear us loud and clear, without any wavering, that they will make the rational decision.

Q. But do you trust the Iranians, this regime?

The President. Well, it's hard to trust a regime that doesn't trust their own people. And so part of our belief is that the Iranians ought to listen to the reformers in their country, those who believe in democracy and then—and give them a say in government. After all, the French model and the U.S. model believes in—people ought to be able to express themselves in a free society.

Q. Two quick last questions, Mr. President.

The President. Sure.

Iraq

Q. Iraq is having explosions, terrorist attacks every day. Do you fear about not having a national reconciliation? There might be a civil war. Do you fear also that the Shiite leaders might decide to build up the sort of theocracy like in Iran?

The President. Yes. No, of course, I'm heartened by the fact that the leadership of the Shi'a election parties, the political parties that took their message to the people, campaigned on the notion of minority rights and a unified country. There are still terrorists there. But the terrorists suffered a major defeat when over 8 million people went to the polls and said, "You will not intimidate us. You can't stop us from expressing our desire." I'm very optimistic and very encouraged about a free Iraq becoming a stable partner in peace, an ally in the war on terror, and a clear example to others in the greater Middle East that freedom is possible.

* White House correction.

Palestinian Authority/Israel

Q. Last question, Mr. President. Near East, don't you fear that if sooner than later, Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon don't reach a global peace agreement based on land for peace, that all this bunch of Islamic group terrorists, Hamas, Jihad, Hezbollah, might try to get rid of Mahmoud Abbas and get in total war with Israel?

The President. No, that's a concern, of course. And I'm impressed by President Abbas' leadership. We want to support him as he moves forward to develop a Palestinian state based upon democratic institutions. And I think we're making great progress. The good news is, is that Europe and Russia and the United Nations, the United States all understands that we've got to make progress to head off these terrorists so that they don't—so they can't capture the imaginations of the Palestinian people anymore. In other words, terrorism is not the path to peace and security and freedom and hope, and that's democracy. And we're making great progress.

And I look forward to talking to President Chirac about the progress we're making and remind him, as well as the people of France, that we'll stay engaged. The United States of America sees a settlement within reach, like I said in my State of the Union, and therefore if you can see it in reach, it means all the more reason to stay fully engaged in the peace process.

Q. I wish you all the very best, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, sir. Looking forward to it. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:34 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Jacques Chirac of France; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. The interviewer referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With VRT Belgian Public Broadcasting

February 18, 2005

Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, it's your first international trip in your second term. Does it mean that transatlantic relations are a top priority now for you? And how are you going to restore the European confidence in the American politics?

The President. Yes. No, the transatlantic relations have always been a top priority, because of all the nations in the world, we share common values—America is more likely to share common values of peace and freedom and human rights and human dignity. And we've had our differences, obviously. But that's okay. The key is to move past differences and to focus on how we can leave behind a legacy of peace and freedom for our children and grandchildren.

And so I'm looking forward to it. I want to thank the Belgian Government and the Belgian people for hosting the meetings, the NATO meetings and the EU meetings. And Laura and I are anxious to come. It's—we've got very fond memories of our first trip to Belgium. This is a chance to reconfirm a vital relationship and to say there's so much we can do, whether it be in the Middle East or joining together to fight disease and poverty and terror. There's a lot we can do.

Iraq

Q. Iraq is a big issue, of course. During your trip, Belgium—NATO joined in for the training program. Belgium, well, they only are contributing financially. Are you going to insist on more support from a country as Belgium and from Europe?

The President. No, not from—listen, the Government of Belgium makes the decision that they're comfortable with. And all I can ask is—say, "Thanks for considering it. Thank you for the financial contribution, and if you're comfortable supporting the training missions with troops, fine. If not, you're still our friend."

Q. Yes, especially after the opposition—the Belgian opposition against Iraqi war.

The President. Absolutely. I mean, I understand that. No, we can't—I don't believe